

## **St. James of Jerusalem, Long Beach, NY Committee on Racial Reconciliation**

Every year since 2021, on April 4<sup>th</sup> – the anniversary of the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – St. James joins with a local, predominantly Black church, *New Life Church of Christ, a Disciples of Christ* church headed by Bishop Mark Moses, to host Sanitation Appreciation Day. Our churches provide and serve a delicious lunch to Long Beach’s Sanitation Department in recognition of the fact that Dr. King was murdered while supporting the striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee. We believe that honoring and showing appreciation for our hardworking sanitation workers is a fitting activity in memory of Dr. King’s important work and messages.

Then, in 2022, in the wake of the George Floyd tragedy and a national awakening of the need for racial healing, *Saint James of Jerusalem* formalized its commitment to racial healing by creating the Racial Reconciliation Committee. This Committee has led a variety of activities within the parish and several in partnership with the *New Life Church of Christ*.

Our churches collaborated on a George Floyd memorial service, and planted a garden bush in his memory, and for a while, during COVID, met monthly for bible study and discussion.

Also during COVID, parishioners of our two churches made gift bags for seniors and together distributed them at Long Beach’s four senior apartment buildings.

St. James has hosted speakers on racial justice and reconciliation including:

- Long Beach resident Norris Knight, mentored by Rev. Dr. King, Jr. and who marched with Dr. King in Georgia and Alabama
- NYC Trinity Church member and widely respected author J. Chester Johnson, who visited St. James to discuss his acclaimed bestselling book, *DAMAGED HERITAGE: The Elaine Race Massacre and A Story of Reconciliation*. This book is about (white) Chester's beloved grandfather's role in one of the worst race massacres in our country's history.

Currently, our two churches have invited Gwen Moten to speak at the end of June, 2024. A former White House appointed American Cultural Specialist during the Clinton presidency, Ms. Moten is currently Director of Arts and Culture for the city of Newark, NJ, as well as Music Director and Conductor of the New Jersey Symphony Gospel Chorus and the Count Basie Center for the Arts Gospel Choir. As a child, her best friend was one of the four young girls killed in the 1963 bombing of the Birmingham, Alabama Church. Gwen had planned to be with her friend that Sunday but Gwen’s mother asked her to go on a different Sunday. Gwen met Rev. Dr. King when he came to her friend’s home to pay his respects. St. James has arranged for Gwen to present at the Long Beach Library as part of their Juneteenth program.

Several St. James members participated in the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island Mercer School of Theology’s powerful Sacred Ground Seminar, focusing on *Becoming Beloved Community Where You Are*. St. James will continue to prioritize racial reconciliation and healing, so important to our congregation, city, state, country, and world.